

Balancing Pro Bono Supply and Demand: Challenges and Solutions from the Nonprofit Point of View



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From the Desk of Linda B. Gornitsky, Ph.D.

President, LBG Associates and Founder, LBG Research Institute

The premise of the research was simple. If pro bono volunteers are so helpful, why don't more nonprofits take advantage of this free talent? Does it have to do with the volunteers not meeting expectations, or is it more about the internal workings of the nonprofit?

The answer, of course, is not simple at all. The research offers a complex array of factors that affect whether nonprofits engage with pro bono volunteers and if they do, how successful that engagement is.

The good news is that the nonprofits surveyed were overwhelmingly positive about the work that their volunteers did. Frankly, we are surprised to see how high the marks were. We so frequently hear that "pro bono is not worth the time and trouble," so it was nice to see that the research says otherwise. More than 90% of respondents who have used pro bono volunteers in the past said they would use them again. Clearly it is worth the time and trouble.

Yes, engaging a pro bono volunteer requires an investment of time. Yes, sometimes you run into trouble. The research pinpoints not only where the challenges lie but also suggests solutions in the hope that nonprofits and the volunteers they work with can reduce the friction and make the experience even better.

We hope that the findings are widely distributed so we can spread the word to nonprofits that pro bono is worth the time and trouble. Only then can this valuable resource fulfill its promise to increase nonprofit capacity and effectiveness.



linda@lbg-associates.com
203-325-3154

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Executive Summary

The Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy's 2014 *Giving in Numbers* report called pro bono service the fastest-growing employee engagement program. But with all this growth, will there be sufficient demand for pro bono services to meet the increasing supply of volunteers? To run a successful pro bono program, with high, enthusiastic participation and stellar results, the corporate employee engagement team has to understand the challenges nonprofits face when taking on a volunteer—challenges that might keep them from exploring these valuable resources.

With both third-party help and do-it-yourself resources available to them to successfully solicit and manage pro bono services, what are the issues keeping nonprofits from using pro bono help? What can corporations do to help their partners overcome these obstacles? Ultimately, without a clear understanding of the challenges and solutions from the nonprofit point of view, pro bono's growth will stall and its promise will not be fulfilled.

The goal of this research was to examine the nonprofits' view of pro bono challenges and identify solutions that help both the nonprofit experience and the corporations that want to support them.

How the Survey Defined Pro Bono

Pro bono volunteerism is the donation of professional services that utilize the professional and technical skills of the volunteer and for which the recipient nonprofit would otherwise have to pay. It gives nonprofits access to the business skills and experience they need to develop and implement sound business strategies, increase their capabilities and improve their organizational infrastructure.

Methodology

An online survey was designed with the assistance of the study sponsors that asked questions about the nonprofit experience in all phases of a pro bono project. An incentive was offered for responding. Six nonprofits were drawn at random from all completed surveys to receive a \$250 donation from The Macquarie Group and LBG Research Institute.

The Rating Scale:

- 1 = Extremely Challenging
- 2 = Challenging
- 3 = Somewhat Challenging
- 4 = Not at all Challenging

The online survey was sent by email during the summer of 2015 to lists provided by the study sponsors and partners as well as a list of nonprofits maintained by LBG Associates. Additionally, select nonprofits were interviewed by phone to probe in-depth on their responses to the online survey. Phone interviews were conducted with a cross-section of nonprofits in the U.S., Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia.

The survey questions sought to determine:

- What keeps a nonprofit from embracing pro bono as a solution to a management problem
- What nonprofits consider the biggest challenges working with pro bono volunteers
- The solutions nonprofits have employed to address these challenges
- How successful the pro bono projects have actually been

Use of Pro Bono Volunteers

Of the 1,436 respondents to the survey, 81% or 1,164 of them have used the professional and/or technical skills of volunteers. The majority of nonprofit organizations (88%) surveyed said they turned to pro bono help mainly when a need arose and there was no funding available to address it.

The respondents in this survey gained access to pro bono services mainly through their organizational networks. Below is where respondents have found pro bono volunteers:

- 53% used a Board member's network to find a volunteer
- 46% used a Board member
- 45% found a volunteer within its existing volunteer network
- 45% engaged a volunteer from a corporation with which the nonprofit has a relationship
- 43% found a volunteer by tapping the personal network of someone in the nonprofit

By far, the majority of pro bono projects represented in the study focused on the external relations of the nonprofit:

- 61% used pro bono volunteers for marketing and branding projects
- 41% used them for public relations or communications
- 40% used them for fundraising

Phases of a Pro Bono Engagement

In order to dig deeper into where the sticking points of a pro bono engagement lay, the typical pro bono engagement was divided into phases and asked respondents to rate the tasks involved in each phase based on the rating scale shown on the previous page.

Phase	Rating by Experienced Nonprofits	Rating by Inexperienced Nonprofits
Scope and Preparation	3.07	2.86
Outreach and Securement of Services	3.00	2.69
Volunteer Management	3.19	3.03
Implementation of the Deliverable	2.97	2.72

The table at right shows how both nonprofits that have and have not used pro bono rate the difficulty of each phase.

The respondent group that has not used pro bono consistently rated the phases and their associated tasks as more challenging than the group that has used pro bono before. Interviews with select respondents in that group also revealed a prevailing attitude that pro bono help is not worth the time and trouble. Many said they felt it was better to fundraise and pay for the services they needed. Some cited anecdotal evidence from colleagues to support their position and some just had a gut feeling that this was true

Does Pro Bono Work?

According to the study respondents—yes. Multiple survey questions asked that in different ways:

- 95% strongly agreed, agreed or somewhat agreed that their target issue was addressed
- 82% of projects undertaken by the respondents in the past three years were completed and the deliverable implemented
- 97% said the deliverable was at least somewhat useful; more than half said it was very useful or extremely useful
- 75% said the end product was a good return on their investment of time and resources
- Nearly 84% were at least somewhat satisfied with the overall pro bono experience
- 90% would engage in another pro bono project in the future

Challenges and Solutions

The survey highlighted the challenges nonprofits face when taking on a pro bono volunteer. It also illuminated the solutions they have found as well as some they wished existed.

Challenges	Solutions
Getting Started	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be prepared by using the resources publicly available that walk nonprofits through the pro bono process • Start with a small, discrete project • Ask your network for help and advice
Finding the Right Help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview candidates as if it were a paid position • Find local volunteers that can be interviewed in person • Get references, preferably from other nonprofits for which the volunteer has worked • If working with a project team, vet the team leader • Don't be afraid to say no when the fit is not right • Check that the volunteer has an affinity with the mission
Finding the Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign a point person on staff to manage the project and the volunteer • Overestimate the staff time needed and build that into the timeline • Orient the volunteer upfront • Establish roles and responsibilities for staff • Use pro bono volunteers for regular work flow or client work
Keeping the Project on Track	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement regularly scheduled check-ins and do not cancel them • Have a contingency plan in the event of problems • Ask the volunteer to commit to a realistic number of hours per week • Look for retirees to provide services
Funding the Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include implementation assistance in the statement of work • Ask for an implementation grant if working with a corporation • Investigate potential funding requirements prior to beginning the project • Fundraise for implementation before the project is complete

What Nonprofits Need to Succeed

The nonprofits surveyed said that the following would be helpful:

A comprehensive list of resources. A surprising percentage of respondents—at least 70% of both experienced and inexperienced with pro bono—said they were not aware of the free tools and resources available to them from a number of intermediaries, such as Taproot, Common Impact and Volunteer Canada. A comprehensive list would save them time finding the information they need.

A one-stop collaborative website of online resources. Instead of visiting multiple sites for information, the nonprofits would like to see everyone with educational resources on using pro bono collaborate on a single site.

More templates and tools. There are templates and tools for many aspects of pro bono but there could be more. Some of the tools mentioned included:

- Checklist for vetting potential volunteers
- Sample Statement of Work
- Evaluation guidelines or tool
- Onboarding guide
- Sample timelines and milestones
- Training module for pro bono volunteers on how to work with a nonprofit

Volunteer matching site/volunteer database searchable by nonprofits. While nonprofits appreciate the opportunity to post projects and have potential volunteers apply for those projects, what they asked for in the study was the reverse. They would like to have a database of potential volunteers that they can search to find the skill sets and other qualifiers they are looking for.

Community of users of pro bono. A number of respondents said they wished they could reach out to nonprofits that have used pro bono volunteers successfully that could act as mentors for them as they move through the process. While case studies are great sources of information, they want to be able to communicate with more experienced nonprofits.

How Corporations Can Help

Corporations can be part of the solutions to the challenges that nonprofits face. As a provider of pro bono volunteers, a company can dramatically impact the success of the project by taking a holistic view and giving all the support it can before, during and after the project.

Corporations can:

Challenges	Solutions
Getting Started	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide educational resources • Suggest a small, discrete project as a start
Finding the Right Help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide candidates for the nonprofit to choose from • Assess candidates' affinity to the nonprofit's mission
Finding the Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure the volunteer is sensitive to the issue and not causing additional work or asking for immediate feedback or turnaround on project work • Provide additional help, such administrative help or funds for a temp
Keeping the Project on Track	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow employees to attend meetings or work on the project during the workday without repercussions
Funding the Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a grant or additional pro bono help for implementation

Respondent Demographics

Nonprofits of all sizes, locations and cause areas were represented in the respondent group. The majority were located in North America:

- 82% were based in the United States
- 11% in Canada
- 0.2% in Mexico

The rest were based outside North America, with the largest pockets of respondents from Europe and Asia (about 2% each). Africa and Australia/New Zealand represented about 1.5% of respondents.

The respondents worked in a range of cause areas:

- 21% were education and youth nonprofits
- 14% were in human services
- 10% worked in arts, culture or humanities
- 9% in housing and homelessness

The majority of respondents worked in the headquarters office of the nonprofit (89%). The remaining 11% worked in a local or satellite office.

A plurality of respondents was small nonprofits in terms of budget:

- 45% of respondents had a budget under \$1 million
- 18% had an organizational budget between \$1 million and \$2 million
- 37% had a budget of \$2 million or more

About LBG Associates

LBG Associates is a woman-owned consulting firm focused on designing, implementing, and managing social responsibility and employee engagement programs and initiatives. Founded in 1993 by Dr. Linda Gornitsky, LBG Associates is committed to providing clients with creative and innovative solutions in a personal, professional, cost-effective, and timely manner.

LBG Associates drives social change through:

- Advice to help companies develop strategic, innovative programs that help communities become better places to live and work
- Implementation of strategies, programs, policies, and procedures, especially for companies with limited time and/or expertise
- Research on cutting-edge issues, groundbreaking trends, “best practices,” and pressing social needs and concerns
- Training that equips practitioners with the knowledge and skills to become “strategic thinkers” and to grow and advance in the field of corporate community involvement

Advice, implementation, research, and training represent LBG Associates’ philosophy about advancing socially responsible business practices. Although steeped in research and scientific methodologies, the firm’s approach to corporate community involvement is more of an art than science, more creative than formulaic.

Specific Services Provided

In response to clients’ needs, LBG Associates’ services include the design, implementation, management, and evaluation of entire community outreach/citizenship programs. The firm helps clients establish and maintain images as good corporate citizens and socially responsible companies by offering custom-tailored services in the following areas:

- Foundation and corporate giving
- Employee engagement (giving and volunteerism)
- Strategic relationship development
- Strategic communications development
- Special events planning and sponsorships
- Research and benchmarking capabilities
- Program evaluation
- Training and staff development

Contact us at:
LBG Associates
245 Long Close Road
Stamford, CT 06902
linda@lbg-associates.com
203-325-3154
www.lbg-associates.com



About LBG Research Institute

LBG Research Institute was founded in 2006 by Dr. Linda B. Gornitsky, a leading consultant in corporate philanthropy and community involvement. The Institute has been serving the profession as a source of public and client-driven research, most notably in the areas of workplace giving, employee engagement and corporate philanthropy in today's challenging economy.

Among the Institute's programs is the Thought Leader Forum, an invitation-only gathering of corporate citizenship leaders who meet to discuss the "big ideas" in citizenship today.

Research reports published by the Institute include:

- Workplace Giving Works: Make It Work for You
- Motivating Volunteering in Tough Times (with LBG Associates)
- Corporate Giving in the New Economy

Contact us at:
LBG Research Institute
245 Long Close Road
Stamford, CT 06902
donna@lbgresearch.org
203-240-5766
www.lbgresearch.org

LBG Leadership

Linda B. Gornitsky, Ph.D., President, LBG Associates and Founder, LBG Research Institute

Dr. Gornitsky is president and founder of LBG Associates, a consulting firm that specializes in the development of strategic corporate citizenship and employee engagement programs, benchmarking, community attitude and evaluation studies, image-building/communications campaigns and efficient management practices.

Prior to establishing LBG Associates in 1993, Dr. Gornitsky developed and managed strategic contributions programs for Citibank and Pfizer.

Dr. Gornitsky publishes on various aspects of corporate citizenship and has completed over 12 groundbreaking studies on subjects such as volunteerism, the environment, disaster relief and diversity. The most recent ones are on global employee engagement (2014) and the building blocks of a successful volunteer program (2012).

She is an adjunct professor at NYU and was a faculty member at the Center for Corporate Citizenship at Boston College. She was a member of the faculty of the Points of Light Corporate Institute and an evaluator for the Civic 50. She is a frequent speaker at conferences and organized a conference on global corporate citizenship.

Dr. Gornitsky is on the boards of Autism360, Jewish Family Service and UJF in Stamford, CT and is president of LBG Research Institute. She was honored for her commitment to her local community in 2007.

She earned her Ph.D. in Environmental Psychology at City University of New York and holds a Master of Philosophy, Master of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees, all in psychology.

Donna Devaul, MPPM, Vice President of Research, LBG Associates and Executive Director, LBG Research Institute

Donna Devaul is vice president of research for LBG Associates. In this role, Ms. Devaul has conducted research for clients on all aspects of corporate community involvement, including workplace giving, employee volunteerism, corporate giving and more. She is the author of numerous research studies, including "Global Employee Engagement: Challenges and Solutions," "Secrets to Creating High-Impact Strategic Partnerships," "Corporate Giving in the New Economy" and "Workplace Giving Works! Make It Work for You." In addition to her position at LBG Associates, Ms. Devaul is Executive Director of LBG Research Institute, where she is responsible for membership, marketing, research and administration.

Previously, Ms. Devaul was director of marketing for Irving Levin Associates, Inc., a privately held newsletter publisher in Norwalk, CT. There she was responsible for the marketing strategy and execution of all marketing programs, and the daily operations of the firm. Prior to joining Levin in 2001, she held marketing positions at Simba Information, a Primedia company, and Money magazine, a Time Inc. publication. Her editorial credits include managing editor of Catalog Age magazine, where she won regional and national editing awards. While at Levin, she won marketing awards from both The Newsletter on Newsletters and the Specialized Information Publishers Foundation.

Ms. Devaul is a magna cum laude graduate of Hamilton College and holds a Masters in Public and Private Management from Yale University.